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SUBJECT: FINLAND WELCOMES MORE, BUT NOT ALL, VOICES IN  
ARCTIC COUNCIL

(SBU) 1. In an August 20 meeting with Pol/Econ Officers, Ministry of Environment Director General (International Affairs Unit) Jukka Uosukainen shared Finland's interest in expanding discussion within the Arctic Council on key topics.

Specifically, the Finnish Government (GOF) believes that all Council discussions should include the eight permanent members rather than only the five members with Arctic territorial claims. However, regarding others interested in a greater role or voice in the Arctic Council, the GOF remains quite cautious.

(SBU) 2. The GOF feels the European Union (EU) also has an important role to play in the Arctic Council. Uosukainen is aware of the concerns of other members regarding Permanent Observer status for the EU, e.g., Canada's concerns about the EU's recent ban on seal hunting. He also acknowledged that accepting the EU as a Permanent Observer could affect the political dynamic of the Council, and expressed the GOF's own concerns about the influence of larger EU members (geographically distant from the Arctic) in Arctic Council discussions. Finland remains interested in finding an official status for the EU that suits all Arctic Council members.

(SBU) 3. Finland is less enthusiastic about other nations - particularly China - receiving permanent observer status. China, Italy and South Korea currently hold ad-hoc observer status allowing them to sit in as observers on select Arctic Council meetings. The GOF is concerned that their commercial interests in the Arctic are not aligned with the Arctic Council's larger mandate to protect the Arctic environment and its indigenous populations.

(SBU) 4. COMMENT: The GOF's policy in the Arctic region to date has been environmental protection and support for the needs of the Arctic's indigenous populations. However, Finland is also pragmatically considering its own commercial interests. As the Arctic opens up, Finland sees opportunities in new shipping lanes and increased icebreaker services. Although their support for Arctic environmental protection will remain strong, new commercial interests may also influence their views on the Arctic Council's future mandate and composition. END COMMENT.

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